BRANDON LEE

Taken Too Soon

Epitaphs...

Wayne Allen Sallee
Words
Ralph Horsley
Art/Lettering
Gregory Loudon
Cover

This is a book I never wanted to do.
Not like this.
I've been a fan of Brandon's since I first saw him in a preview of **Showdown in Little Tokyo**. A film in which Brandon showed some real potential as an actor and fantastic martial arts skill. I am a student of the arts and watched him grow with each film and knew this guy was going to become a legend. I was practically drooling when I found out he was cast as **The Crow**. He was going to soar.

And he did.

I find myself most sympathetic to Brandon's widow.
I lost the woman I love to a violent death last July.
There are no words to ease the suffering.
No little tokens of empathy can help.
But to Brandon's family and friends,
you have my truest and deepest condolences.

Hart D. Fisher
Publisher

Shadows

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Printed in Canada.

WITNESS THE OPENING SCENE OF THE BALL-BITING FILM "THE CROW."
ERIC
1963
1993
ERIC RISES FROM THE GRAVE TO EXACT VENGEANCE ON THE DRUG DEALERS WHO KILLED HIM AND HIS GIRLFRIEND.

LIFE SOMETIMES IMITATES ART.
IN THE CASE OF BRANDON LEE, THOUGH, THERE IS NO VENGEANCE.
THE CROW
3/30/93
BRAND
1965
NO RISING FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE.
CUT! CUT!
THE STAR IN THE MOVIE, LIKE HIS FATHER BEFORE HIM, PROVES HIMSELF VUNERABLE TO THE VAGARIES OF FATE. BRANDON LEE IS DEAD.

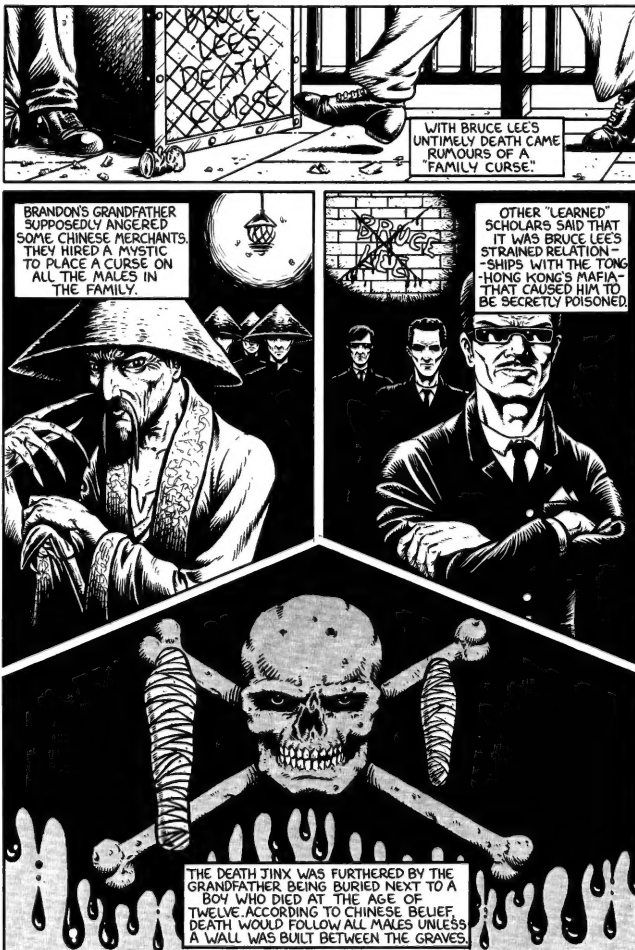
SHOT ON THE FIFTIETH DAY OF FILMING. WITH A PROP THAT SHOULD NOT HAVE MISFIRED.
FOLLOWING HIS FATHER BRUCE'S FOOTSTEPS IN BOTH LIFE AND DEATH, BRANDON LEE WAS...
Taken too soon

THAT WAS HOW IT ENDED. THIS IS HOW IT BEGAN.
BRANDON WAS LIKELY THE FIRST CHILD STAR TO MAKE HIS FIRST TELEVISION APPEARANCE BY BREAKING BOARDS WITH HIS FATHER.
AN APPEARANCE FAR DIFFERENT FROM WHAT AN AMERICAN AUDIENCE SAW.
AT THE AGE OF FIVE, BRANDON ALREADY HAD AN IMAGE TO LIVE UP TO.

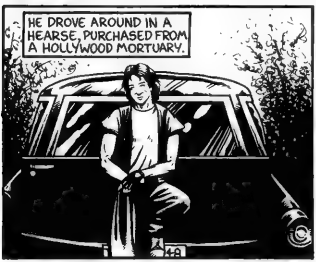
BY 1970, BRUCE LEE WAS ALREADY KNOWN INTERNATIONALLY BY HIS FILMS, AS WELL AS THE PART OF KATO IN THE 1966-1967 SERIES THE GREEN HORNET.
"I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT COMPARISONS WITH MY FATHER," BRANDON SAID IN JANUARY 1993. "I'VE DONE MY WORK AND I'M HAPPY WITH IT. I RESPECT MY FATHER VERY MUCH, BUT I'M A DIFFERENT PERSON THAN HE WAS."
TRUTHFUL WORDS.
HIS OWN DEATH, IN FACT.
I'LL NEVER LIVE TO BE THIRTY
UNLIKE HIS FATHER, BRANDON WAS OBSESSED WITH DEATH.
HE VISITED THE GRAVESITE OF THE DOORS' JIM MORRISON SEVERAL TIMES.
OBSESSION.

AS A CHILD, BRANDON WAS FORCED TO BREAK THE BOARDS AND PRACTICE THE KICKS. LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON.
WARREN BEATTY AND FAYE DUNAWAY IN
ONNIE & CLYDE"
WHEN HE WAS ONLY FIVE, HE WOULD TELL HIS PARENTS THAT HE WANTED TO BE AN ACTOR WHEN HE GOT OLDER.
"I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT COMPARISONS WITH MY FATHER," BRANDON SAID TO BLACK BELT MAGAZINE SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE HIS DEATH. "I'VE DONE MY WORK AND I'M HAPPY WITH IT... I RESPECT MY FATHER VERY MUCH, BUT I'M A VERY DIFFERENT PERSON THAN HE WAS."

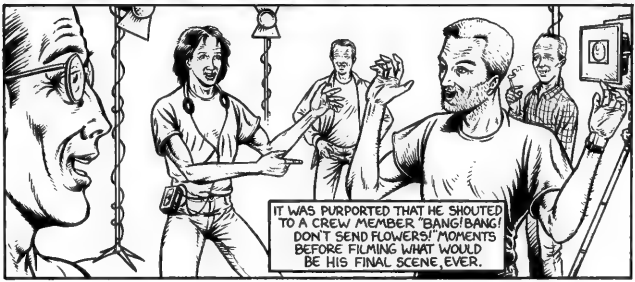
IT WAS HIS MOTHER ALONE WHO CAME TO SEE HOW SERIOUS HER SON WAS ABOUT ACTING.
A STUNT MAN ONCE SAID THAT BRUCE HAD AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT ON THE STUNT-FIGHTING INDUSTRY. NO-ONE COULD MATCH HIS INTENSITY.
ON 20 JULY 1973, BARELY THIRTY-TWO, BRUCE LEE DIED IN HONG KONG. THE CAUSE WAS A BRAIN EDEMA.
ENTER THE DRAGON HAD BEEN A BLOCKBUSTER HIT EARLIER THAT SPRING. BUT WITHIN MONTHS, LEE WAS SUFFERING FROM HEADACHES, KEEPING THEM FROM HIS FAMILY.


BRUCE LEE'S DEATH CURSE
WITH BRUCE LEE'S UNTIMELY DEATH CAME RUMOURS OF A "FAMILY CURSE."
BRANDON'S GRANDFATHER SUPPOSEDLY ANGERED SOME CHINESE MERCHANTS. THEY HIRED A MYSTIC TO PLACE A CURSE ON ALL THE MALES IN THE FAMILY.
OTHER "LEARNED" SCHOLARS SAID THAT IT WAS BRUCE LEE'S STRAINED RELATION--SHIPS WITH THE TONG--HONG KONG'S MAFIA--THAT CAUSED HIM TO BE SECRETLY POISONED.
THE DEATH JINX WAS FURTHERED BY THE GRANDFATHER BEING BURIED NEXT TO A BOY WHO DIED AT THE AGE OF TWELVE. ACCORDING TO CHINESE BELIEF, DEATH WOULD FOLLOW ALL MALES UNLESS A WALL WAS BUILT BETWEEN THE GRAVES.

WHETHER IT WAS FAMILY FICTION OR ACTUAL TRUTH, THE TALK OF CURSES LEFT BRANDON WITH AN OBSESSION TOWARDS DEATH.

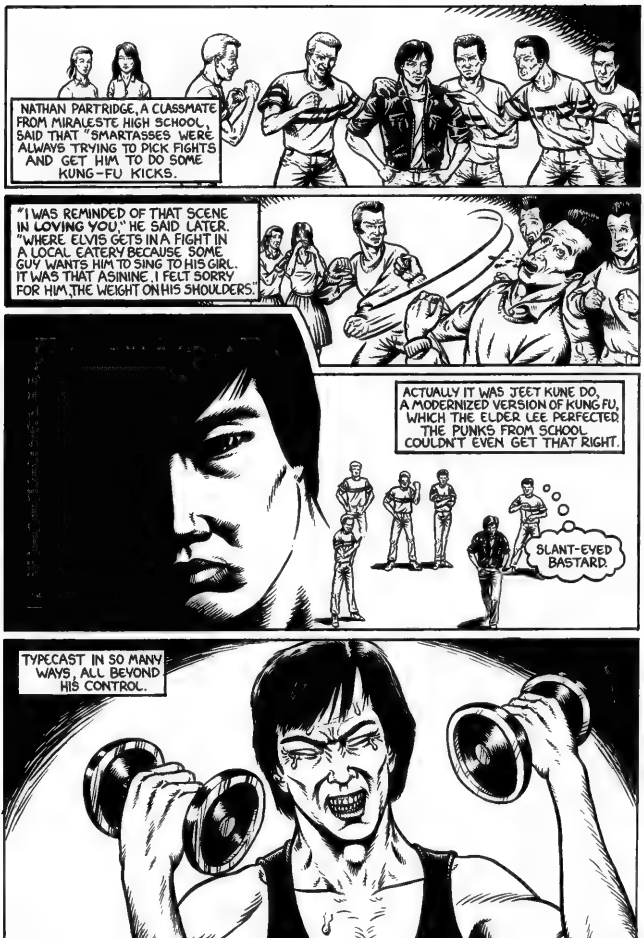

HE DROVE AROUND IN A HEARSE, PURCHASED FROM A HOLLYWOOD MORTUARY.

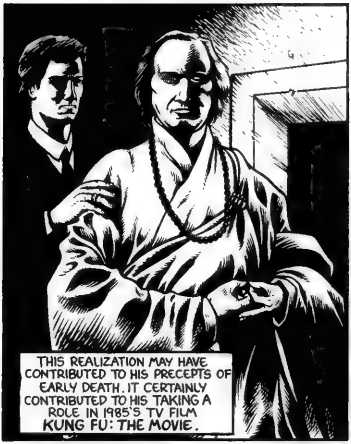
HE TOLD HIS FIANCEE, ELIZA HUTTON, THAT HE WANTED TO GET MARRIED AND START A FAMILY SOON. "THERE'S A CURSE ON THIS FAMILY, AND I'M GOING TO BE THE NEXT TO GO."


IT WAS PURPORTED THAT HE SHOUTED TO A CREW MEMBER "BANG! BANG! DON'T SEND FLOWERS!" MOMENTS BEFORE FILMING WHAT WOULD BE HIS FINAL SCENE, EVER.

THE FILM WOULD HAVE CATAPULTED LEE TO STARDOM. NOT HIS FIRST MOVIE, STILL BRANDON FELT SO CERTAIN ABOUT HIS FUTURE THAT HE ASKED ELIZA TO MARRY HIM.
THE DATE WAS SET FOR 17 APRIL, AFTER FILMING ON THE CROW WAS DONE.
HE HAD FINALLY EMBRACED HIS FATHER'S LEGACY. AN ARTICLE IN PEOPLE MAGAZINE SAID, HE WAS HAPPY WITH HIS CAREER.

IT HAD TAKEN A LONG TIME FOR BRANDON'S ACCEPTANCE, AND IN THE END, HIS MOTHER'S ACCEPT--ANCE OF HIS ACTING CAREER.
SLAM
HE WAS KICKED OUT OF TWO HIGH SCHOOLS AND DROPPED OUT OF A THIRD.
LOU DIAMOND PHILLIPS, WHO PORTRAYED RICHIE VALENS IN LA BAMBA, ANOTHER TALENT WHO WAS SNATCHED BY AN EARLY DEATH IN 1959, WAS FRIENDS WITH LEE DURING THOSE TIMES.
"NOT I, NOT ANYONE ELSE CAN TRAVEL THAT ROAD FOR YOU, YOU MUST TRAVEL FOR YOURSELF."
WHIT
HE DESCRIBED BRANDON AS A 'BOILING MASS OF ENERGY.'


NATHAN PARTRIDGE, A CLASSMATE FROM MIRALESTE HIGH SCHOOL, SAID THAT "SMARTASSES WERE ALWAYS TRYING TO PICK FIGHTS AND GET HIM TO DO SOME KUNG-FU KICKS.
"I WAS REMINDED OF THAT SCENE IN LOVING YOU," HE SAID LATER. "WHERE ELVIS GETS IN A FIGHT IN A LOCAL EATERY BECAUSE SOME GUY WANTS HIM TO SING TO HIS GIRL. IT WAS THAT ASININE. I FELT SORRY FOR HIM, THE WEIGHT ON HIS SHOULDERS."
ACTUALLY IT WAS JEET KUNE DO, A MODERNIZED VERSION OF KUNG FU, WHICH THE ELDER LEE PERFECTED. THE PUNKS FROM SCHOOL COULDN'T EVEN GET THAT RIGHT.
SLANT-EYED BASTARD.
TYPECAST IN SO MANY WAYS, ALL BEYOND HIS CONTROL.
RCH NOV '98 #13


THIS REALIZATION MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO HIS PRECEPTS OF EARLY DEATH. IT CERTAINLY CONTRIBUTED TO HIS TAKING A ROLE IN 1985'S TV FILM KUNG FU: THE MOVIE.

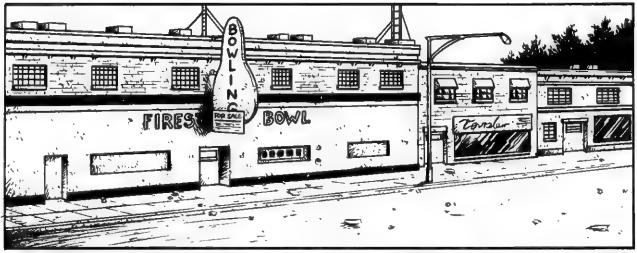
BRANDON SAID JOKINGLY THAT HE WANTED TO PLAY HAMLET, BUT HE KNEW WHAT WERE THE ONLY DOORS THAT WERE GOING TO OPEN FOR HIM.

"A LARGE PART OF MY LIFE REVOLVED AROUND MY DAD," HE SAID AFTER FILMING LEGACY OF RAGE IN 1986. THE MOVIE WAS SHOT ENTIRELY IN CANTON-ESE, WHICH BRANDON SPOKE FLUENTLY.

HIS FIRST MAJOR FILM CAME ALONG FIVE YEARS LATER, AS BRANDON CO-STARRED WITH DOLPH LUNDGREN IN SHOW-DOWN IN LITTLE TOKYO.

"IT WAS A TYPICAL HOLLYWOOD BUDDY FILM, BUT LEE MADE IT FUNNY AND INTERESTING," HARRY BENDIX, A CHICAGO CASTING AGENT SAID. "HE WAS CERTAINLY MORE ANGLICIZED THAN HIS FATHER, AND THE FILM ALLOWED HIM TO STEP FROM THE STEREOTYPE.
BRANDON COMMENTED ON A SCENE WHERE HE WAS RUN-NING DOWN A FIRE ESCAPE, FLAMES BEHIND HIM. "I KEPT THINKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED ON THE SET OF THE 'TWILIGHT ZONE' FILM," HE SAID.
"HE WAS ALWAYS SAVING DOLPH LUNDGREN," FILMAKER BENDIX SAID IN PHASES MAGAZINE. "IT WAS APPARENT THAT HIS REBELLIOUS NATURE WAS WELL-FOUNDED. BRANDON WAS A VERY TALENTED ACTOR REGARD-LESS OF THE TYPECASTING."
HE WAS REFERRING TO THE MOST INFAMOUS OF FILM DISASTERS. IN 1982, VIC MORROW AND TWO VIETNAMESE CHILDREN WERE KILLED WHEN A HELICOPTER CRASHED ON TOP OF THEM IN HIGH WINDS. THE AUTOPSY STATED THAT THERE WERE SEVENTY-EIGHT GASHES FROM THE CHOPPER BLADES IN MORROW'S SEVERED HEAD.

RAPID FIRE
THIS BECAME APPARENT THE FOLLOW-ING YEAR, WHEN BRANDON RECEIVED SOLE BILLING IN THE FILM RAPID FIRE.
LEE PLAYS JAKE LO, A YOUNG MAN EMBITTERED BY HIS FATHER'S MURDER DURING THE TIANAMEN SQUARE UPRISING IN CHINA DURING JULY OF '89.
NICK MANCUSO KILLS AN ASSOCIATE WHILE LO IS ATTENDING AN ART OPENING AND LO IS IN TURN MARKED FOR DEATH.
LO, AMONG PEOPLE WITH CHAMPAGNE GLASSES, WITNESSES WHAT HAPPENS THROUGH A WINDOW.
THE CHINK SAW ME. CHOP CHANG!

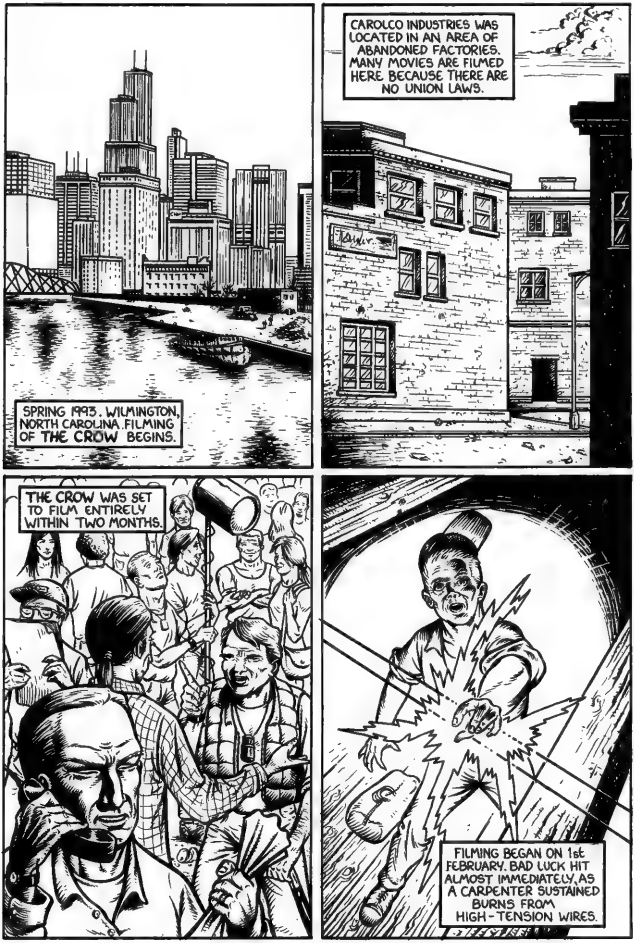

BOWLIN
FIRES
BOWL

LO IS 'RECRUITED' BY LT. MACE RYAN, PLAYED BY POWERS BOOTH, OF THE CHICAGO POLICE. IT IS HIS CHANCE TO GET THE HEAD OF THE COSA NOSTRA, PLAYED BY ANTONIO SERRANO, OFF HIS BACK.
THIS UP

KARLA WITHERS PORTRAYS KATE HODGE, A TAC OFFICER WHO FALLS IN LOVE WITH LO.

"THE FILM INDUSTRY LOST OUT ON A RISING STAR WHEN BRANDON LEE DIED," SID DEGAN WROTE IN THE WINDY CITY TIMES. "HE TOOK THE MOST CLICHED SITUATIONS AND MADE THEM BELIEVABLE."
IT'S MY JOB.
AH CHRIST, ANOTHER HERO.
LO GOES AFTER SERRANO'S MAIN ASSASSIN, ZIA, PLAYED BY KINMAN TAU. WHEN LT. RYAN ASKS HIM WHY HE HAS TO DISOBEY HIS WISHES, LO REPLIES.
NEEDLESS TO SAY JAKE LO BATTLES ZIA AND SAVES THE DAY. BRANDON LEE BEATS THE ODDS.

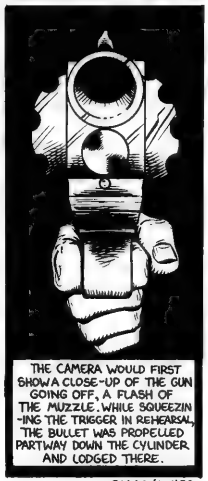
UNFORTUNATELY AND IRONICALLY, BRANDON LEE WOULD NOT BEAT THE ODDS AGAIN.
BRANDON'S NEXT FILM WOULD HAVE CATAPULTED HIM TO CULT STATUS, EVEN IF HE HADN'T DIED. THE CROW WAS BASED ON A COMIC BY J.O'BARR, PUBLISHED BY TUNDRA IN THE EARLY 1980'S.
THE CROW, ORIGINALLY A THREE-ISSUE COMIC WITH LYRIC PROSE BLEEDING INTO GRAPHIC ARTWORK IS ABOUT A MAN WHO AVENGES THE MURDER OF HIS GIRL-FRIEND IN THE DETROIT SUBURBS.
THE CROW WAS ALSO KILLED BY DRUG DEALERS. IT IS A REINCARNATION THAT WREAKS VENGEANCE INDISCRIMINATELY IN ORDER TO EASE HIS CONSCIENCE.


SPRING 1993. WILMINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA. FILMING OF THE CROW BEGINS.
CAROLCO INDUSTRIES WAS LOCATED IN AN AREA OF ABANDONED FACTORIES. MANY MOVIES ARE FILMED HERE BECAUSE THERE ARE NO UNION LAWS.
THE CROW WAS SET TO FILM ENTIRELY WITHIN TWO MONTHS.
FILMING BEGAN ON 1st FEBRUARY. BAD LUCK HIT ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, AS A CARPENTER SUSTAINED BURNS FROM HIGH-TENSION WIRES.

FILMING WAS DONE AT NIGHT AND IT RAINED MUCH OF THE TIME. MORALE PLUMMETED.
CHRISTIAN SLATER WAS ORIGINALLY CAST AS ERIC, BUT BRANDON CAME CHEAP-ER AT $750,000 PLUS A PERCENTAGE OF THE GROSS.
HANGMAN'S JOKE
LEE PATTERNED HIS LOOK AFTER CHRIS ROBINSON OF THE BLACK CROWES, AND LOST SIXTEEN POUNDS TO LOOK MORE GAUNT.
BRANDON RETAINED HIS ENTHUSIASM IN SPITE OF THE GRUELING CONDITIONS. A STUNTMAN BROKE SEVERAL RIBS IN A FALL, ANOTHER JAMMED A SCREW-DRIVER INTO HIS HAND. MIKE DUNLEAVY, A CREW MEMBER, SAID THAT "SAFETY IS OFTEN THE FIRST THING TO GO WHEN THINGS GET THAT CRAZY."

APRIL
17
PERHAPS BRANDON STAVED ON TOP OF THINGS BECAUSE HE HAD SET A DATE FOR MARRYING ELIZA HUTTON ON 17 APRIL AFTER FILMING WOULD HAVE ENDED.

IN THE CRUCIAL SCENE IN WHICH BRANDON LEE WAS KILLED, PRIMERS WERE LOADED INTO A PROP GUN. AMMUNITION HAD BEEN PULLED ABOUT WITH PLIERS, BUT ONE PRIMER REMAINED LIVE. THIS IN ITSELF WAS NOT A TRAGIC OVERSIGHT.


THE CAMERA WOULD FIRST SHOW A CLOSE-UP OF THE GUN GOING OFF, A FLASH OF THE MUZZLE, WHILE SQUEEZING THE TRIGGER IN REHEARSAL. THE BULLET WAS PROPELLED PARTWAY DOWN THE CYLINDER AND LODGED THERE.

RCH·DEC'93 N22·

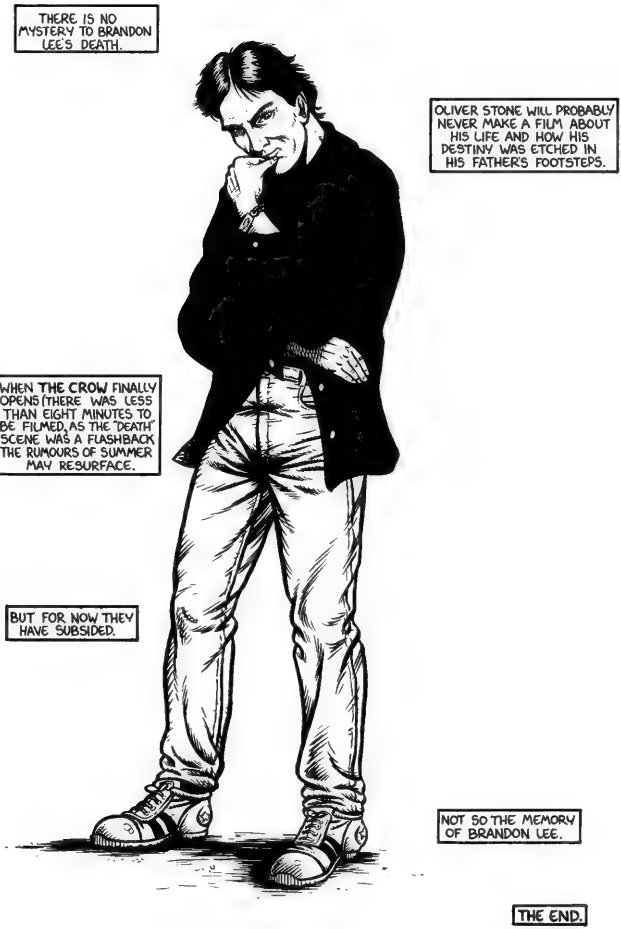
31 MARCH 1993
STAGE SET 4.
ERIC WALKS IN ON SHELLY'S ATTACKERS, GROCERIES IN HAND. IT WAS BRANDON'S IDEA THAT ERIC WEAR HEADPHONES, AS TO NOT HEAR HIS GIRLFRIEND'S SCREAMS.
T-BIRD (DAVID PATRICK KELLY) AND FUNBOY (MICHAEL MASSEE) WERE STRADDLING SOFIA SINAS. IT WAS MICHAEL MASSEE WHO FIRED THE FATAL SHOT.
BRANDON KEPT SAYING "CUT, CUT." NO ONE HEARD.

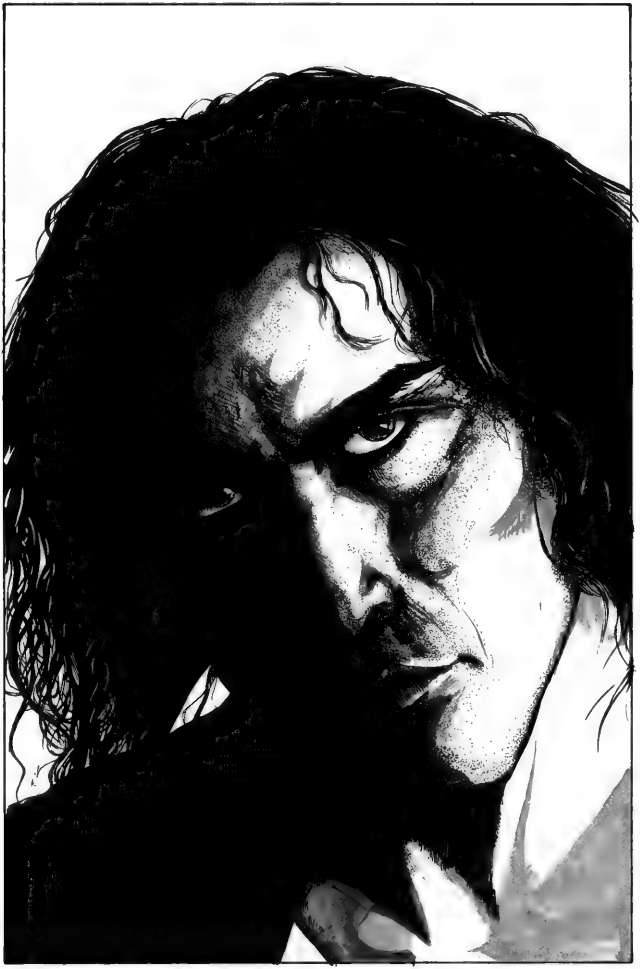
BRANDON FELL FORWARD, FACE TOWARDS THE CAMERA. A 44-CALIBER BULLET WAS LODGED IN HIS ABDOMEN, LATER RETRIEVED FROM THE NEW HANOVER COUNTY MORGUE.

D.A. JERRY SPIVER LATER SAID THAT THERE WAS...
...NO INDICATION THAT ANYONE WAS TRYING TO HURT BRANDON.
NBC

EVEN STILL, BEFORE HIS BURIAL 4 APRIL IN LAKE VIEW CEMETARY IN SEATTLE, NEWSPAPERS AND TELEVISION SHOWS WERE TREATING IT LIKE THE KENNEDY CONSPIRACY.
NBC

NO CHARGES WERE FILED. BRANDON LEE WAS BURIED NEXT TO HIS FATHER. MOURNERS INCLUDED KEIFER SUTHERLAND AND GEORGE SEGAL.


THERE IS NO MYSTERY TO BRANDON LEE'S DEATH.
OLIVER STONE WILL PROBABLY NEVER MAKE A FILM ABOUT HIS LIFE AND HOW HIS DESTINY WAS ETCHED IN HIS FATHERS FOOTSTEPS.
WHEN THE CROW FINALLY OPENS (THERE WAS LESS THAN EIGHT MINUTES TO BE FILMED, AS THE "DEATH" SCENE WAS A FLASHBACK THE RUMOURS OF SUMMER MAY RESURFACE.
BUT FOR NOW THEY HAVE SUBSIDED.
NOT SO THE MEMORY OF BRANDON LEE.
THE END.



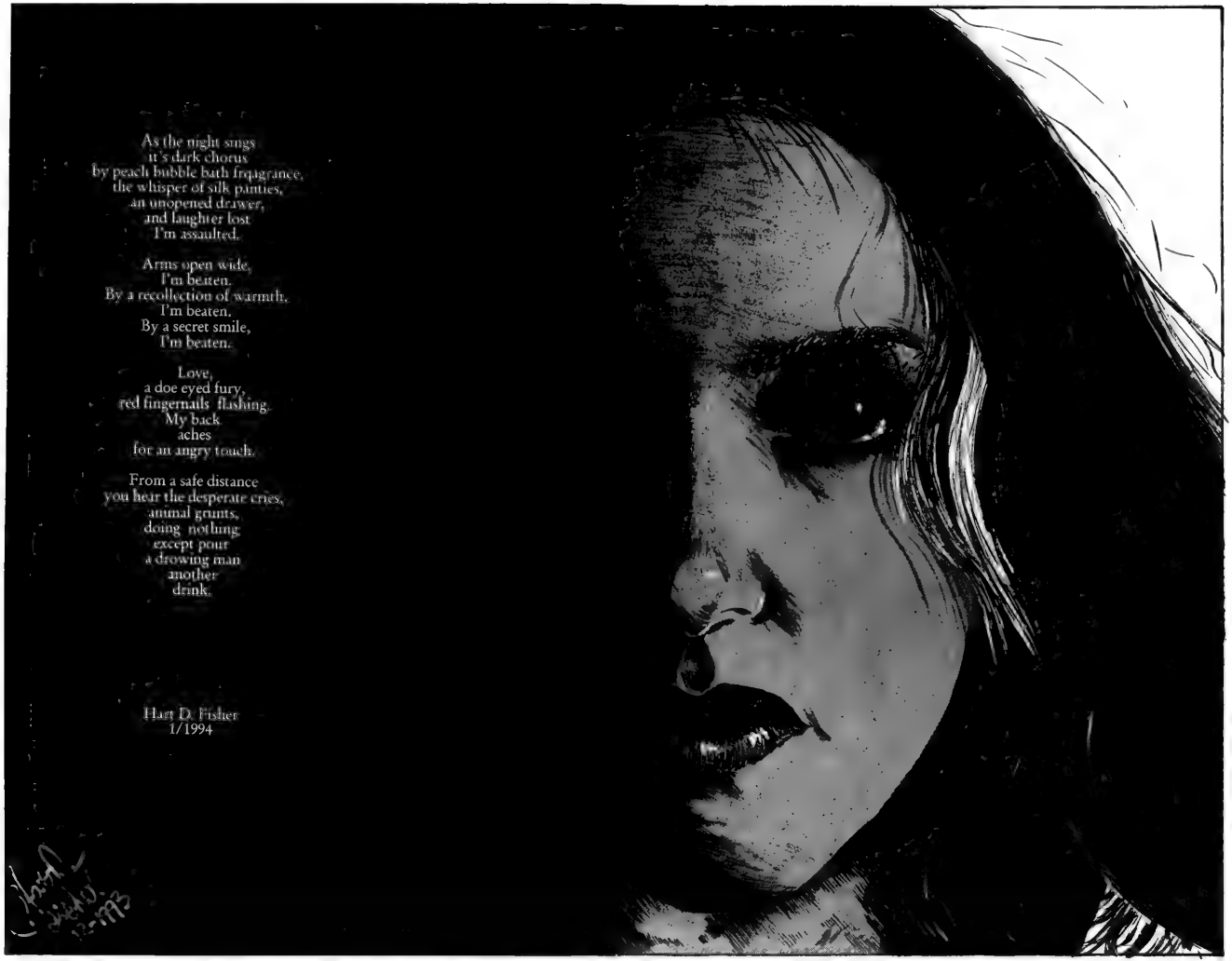
As the night sings
it's dark chorus
by peach bubble bath fragrance,
the whisper of silk panties,
an unopened drawer,
and laughter lost
I'm assaulted.

Arms open wide,
I'm beaten.
By a recollection of warmth,
I'm beaten.
By a secret smile,
I'm beaten.

Love,
a doe eyed fury,
red fingernails flashing.
My back
aches
for an angry touch.

From a safe distance
you hear the desperate cries,
animal grunts,
doing nothing
except pour
a drowning man
another
drink.

Hart D. Fisher
1/1994



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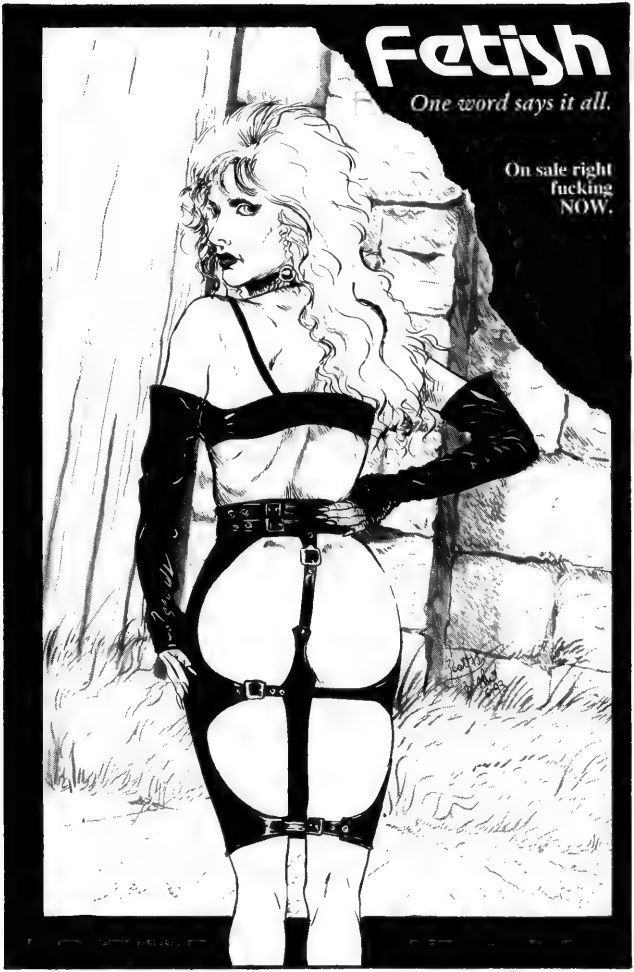
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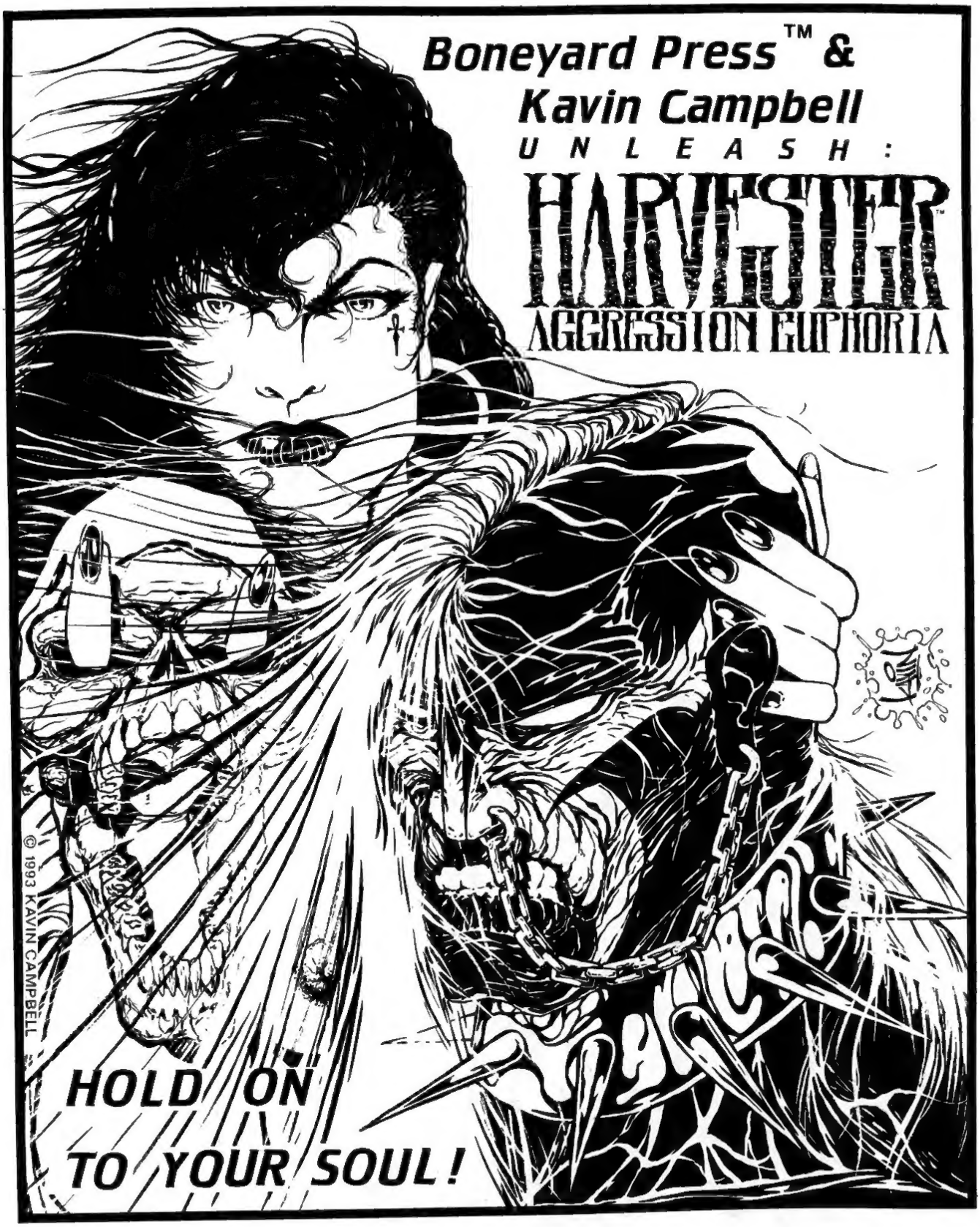
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